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Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Donna Berman. I am the Executive Director of the Charter Oak Cultural Center, here in Hartford.

When I was in rabbinical school, I lived in Greenwich Village. Every day, as I would walk to school from my apartment on 14th street to the seminary at which I studied on West 4th, I would see elderly people lovingly accompanied by their health care workers. The helpers were always women of color and the elderly were always white. And I remember thinking to myself that this was going to be the way we end racism. That white people, young and old, nurtured and cared for and watched over and loved by people of color would bring our shared humanity into focus and we would, at long last, heal the oozing wound of racism. How naïve I was! For generations, people of color have been caring for white people; many children were raised by these women and many people were gently sent on their way to the next life by these women. Despite this and despite the fact that these women being are so often described as "part of the family," they have endured on subsistence wages. The love we feel for these women has never translated into just treatment—fair wages and the benefit of collective bargaining, the chance for a better life for them and *their* families.

Much of Charter Oak's artistic programming, I'm proud to say, confronts barriers faced by women. I am here today to represent Charter Oak's commitment to creating a world of justice and I am here today in honor of those women in Greenwich Village who pushed the wheel chairs and held the hands of New York's elderly. I am here to wholeheartedly express my support of SB 352 and HB 5433.

I am thankful that we have public funding for child care for low-wage workers, most of them women, and thankful that Medicaid funding is available for seniors and people with disabilities so that they can be supported and cared for in their homes. These two programs reflect the highest values of our society and our desire to nurture those in our community who, with help, can do a lot for themselves. They can live with dignity, respect and independence. Built into these noble programs, however, is a terrible injustice. As I suggested earlier, these workers, most of them women, most of them women of color, who care for our loved ones (is there anything more important than that?), are not honored and rewarded for their vital work but are, in fact, condemned to a life of poverty. These workers, most of them women, most of them women of color, some of whom leave their own children and their own aging parents, to provide for the parents and children of others, are paid little and have virtually no power to change their situation. This kind of unjust treatment, this kind of oppression

has a long history, going back to slavery and to the Jim Crow south, when African Americans were forced to abandon their own children to take care of white families.

SB 352 and HB 5433 eliminate barriers to improvements in the livelihood of home health care and child care workers by enabling them to engage in collective bargaining. By successfully advocating for themselves, they will be able to improve their working conditions and, therefore, ultimately the quality of care they provide. In other words, clients and children, about whom these workers care deeply, will also benefit from this state investment in the well-being of all.

Through performance and visual art at the Charter Oak Cultural Center we often expose and address injustice. We bring the message of the dispossessed throughout the world to our performance space and to our galleries. Today I travelled just a few blocks from the Charter Oak to speak to an injustice happening right here in Connecticut. There are child care and home health care workers throughout the state, but most of them live in the poorest towns, with the majority here, in Hartford. These bills will have a positive impact on our entire community.

The most important thing you can do to mitigate economic, gender and racial inequality this session is to pass SB 352 and HB 5433. You have before you a rare chance to uproot a centuries-old injustice. Few pieces of legislation, few legislators are poised to make that kind of a difference in so many people's lives. Please, I urge you to seize this opportunity. Thank you.